

Contemporary India: Issues and Challenges

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Safety Issues of Women in Sports

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We are living in 21st century and ironically on one hand where we are talking about artificial intelligence on the other hand, we are still discussing the issues of women safety in India. Because at this time also women in India are not safe anywhere whether at their home, at work place or outside of their houses or even the female sports athletes to whom we consider as very power full physically. So here being an athlete what I experienced as a sports person myself as well as a teacher about my student athletes I would like to discuss certain female safety issues in sports which restrain our women to participate in sports and games.

The pathway - The prime factor of safety comes when a female has to travel the way from her house to training center or the stadium. Almost all the stadiums are situated away from the city. And the pathway usually is unsafe. Mischievous elements keep standing on the roads to give comments to the Athletes. They feel uneasy to reach to the stadium for practice. While coming back there are no street lights on the way sometimes. How could the parents can be comfortable with this situation? So, they stop them to go for sports practice.

Misusage of the stadiums - What to say of the roads even the stadium its self is not a safe place where a woman can feel safe. Stadium is a public place where in India gamblers and notorious persons you

can find passing their time there sitting ideally commenting the girls and by creating hazards in the practice. Parents are afraid of allowing their girl child to go to such a place where their daughters are not safe.

Psychological pressures - there is lot of psychological pressure on women as she comes out of house for such an activity as about their body image, as well their clothes and their married life future if they continue with sports. She feels not comfortable rather unsafe psychologically which negatively enhance their performance.

Sexual harassment - This is most important point to be considered as nobody can stop such kind of issues unless a strong legal action is taken against such crimes. Who can ever forget the issue of Ruchika the Lawn Tennis player? The girl hardly find justice even after committing suicide. In 2010, members of the Indian national women's hockey team complained against the then head Coach and the team's videographer of sexual harassment was terminated but he was again reinstated as a high-performance manager for the Central Zone hockey programme. In another case, a young female gymnast alleged that her coach and a fellow male player had made disparaging remarks about her clothes during a training session at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, New Delhi. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) launched a probe but alarger conspiracy was alleged. Meanwhile, the accused coach and player flew with the team to the Asian Games. A discus thrower in Karnataka complained of molestation at her SAI center and during a national meet. the coach claimed, in his defense, that he had only touched her during discus throw training. In March 2018, international para-swimmer and coach was suspended for three years after multiple complaints were made against him for recording videos of athletes during the 2017 National Para-Swimming Championship in Jaipur. But denied of the charges claiming that it was an attempt to spoil his image. Another case this year saw five Indian women kabaddi players and a kabaddi coach lodging a complaint with Vijayawada police against the Andhra Pradesh Kabaddi Association State Secretary accusing him of sexual harassment. The stories repeat themselves. A coach abuses a young female athlete, and when it is discovered, team members rally to protect the popular coach, upon whom they've hung their hopes of athletic success. The problem becomes the victim, who is pressured to leave while the coach remains. In another common

scenario, the abuse is discovered, but the family wants to shield the victim from the shame of exposure or police involvement.

Gender Discrimination in the organizations - As we all know that Sports continue to be completely a male territory. Not just in terms of viewers or players but particularly in coaching and administration, where the sex-ratio is heavily skewed. This is a massive problem and might raise concerns around safety in sports for women. A young girl who plans to pursue a career in sports has to get comfortable to a male dominant world and sometimes just live with unwanted glare or lewd remarks.

Selection procedures - The team selection process is dreaded. The absence of clear selection criteria in most sports increases the chances of subjectivity and harassment. Often, financial compulsions tend to push female athletes to succumb to unwelcome sexual advances. Unlike male athletes in India, female sportspersons have fewer employment opportunities. Moreover, a sports career is time sensitive; with promotions being linked to the number of international appearances and medals, there is added pressure on athletes especially female to ensure they get selected to as many state and national teams before they start their families.

Redress grievances against sexual harassment - For some reason, most of the sports organizations are under a belief that Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace

“Any sport institute, stadium, sports complex or competitions or games venue, whether residential or not used for training, sports or other activities relating thereto.”

This Act is very much applicable to the sports organization. Further, the Act states that any workplace with more than 10 employees needs an internal complaints committee (ICC). This committee is specifically set up to hear and redress grievances against sexual harassment.

The National Sports Development Code of India of 2011 said that it is the responsibility of the NSFs and other sports bodies to ensure safety in sports for women. They were asked to include rules prohibiting sexual harassment, notify everyone about these rules, and have

appropriate forums for women to raise the issue. The setting up of a complaint's mechanism was mandated, with even provision for a third party who is familiar with the issue of sexual harassment. A majority of federations have not put these mechanisms in place, and by virtue of that are guilty of violating the law.

Some of these NSFs have athletes' commissions to deal with complaints and grievances, but they are not as is mandated specifically for sexual harassment, and headed by women. The general procedure is approaching the officials, the secretary or president, and communicating verbally. This means there is no documented complaint, which is a pre-requisite in ICC

Safety measures for women in sports - Here are few simple ways to ensure safety in sports for women. Athletes believe that a website, mobile app or dedicated helpline number to file complaints anonymously is a necessity. Alternatively, government and private-run hostels should make available a list of contacts for relevant NGOs that deal with sexual harassment since most athletes have no clue that such organizations exist. It is important for federations and the Sports Ministry to formulate guidelines on how to deal with cases of harassment. Athletes, parents/guardians, coaches and administrators must also undergo mandatory training on these guidelines. Rigorous background checks should be conducted on coaches appointed by schools and colleges to ensure proper credentials. Federations must only recognize tournaments that provide a safe environment for athletes including basic facilities such as separate locker rooms and functioning washrooms for girls/women. CCTV cameras should be installed in hostels, training facilities and tournament venues. All district, state and national sports federations must be brought under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Conclusion - It was the most hysterical moment for the nation to see PV Sindhu bagging Gold at the Badminton World Championship and Silver at the Olympics or when we saw boxer Mary Kom making history at the World Boxing Championship, as well Karnam, Sakshi, Nehwal for bringing laurels for the country. We feel pride seeing these talented women flying the Indian flag higher. However, this is not an end to the road this is just the beginning and now it's the time to ensure that women are given safety in sports Sexual harassment has been a decade old slow-burning fuse in the sports arena which is neither new

nor surprising for women who have been battling this catastrophe throughout their professional careers. This poses a big question on safety in sports for women. We must raise the voice against such crimes and persistently made the effort for safety of women in Sports. Proper safety arrangement must be made by on the roads and stadiums. Security guards must be on duty all the times, identity cards must be issued to the users of the stadiums, A counselor should also sit in the centers. Educate the women athletes and the parents for the laws against such crimes. So, by adopting all these measures we can ensure safety of women in sports as well number of participation and the count of medals for our country.

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